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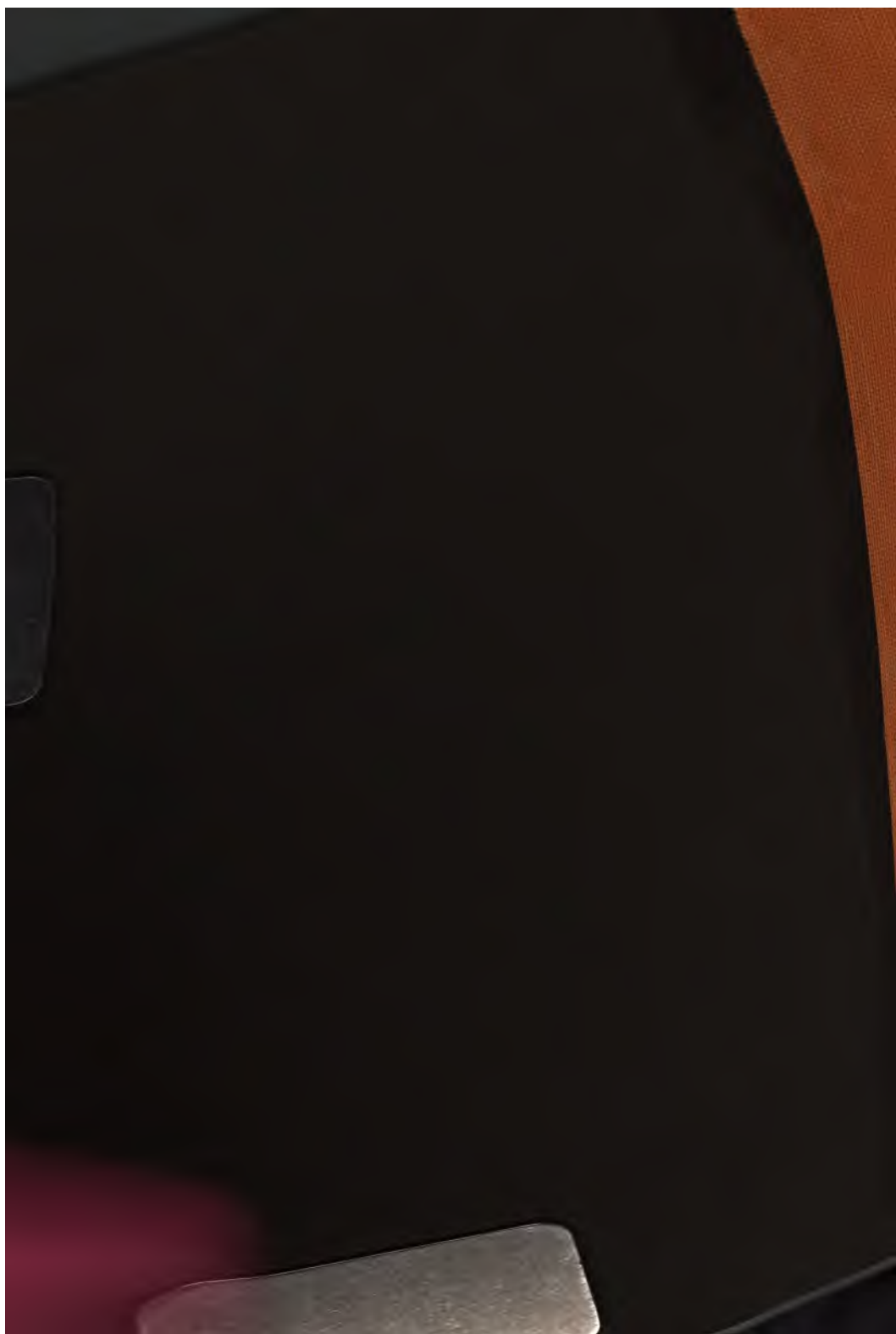
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The South and the National Government

By

The Honorable William Howard Taft

President-elect of the United States



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The South and the National Government

By
The Honorable William Howard Taft
President-elect of the United States

An Address
Delivered at the Dinner of the North Carolina Society
of New York, at the Hotel Astor, December 7, 1908

Introduction

The speech of the President-Elect at the recent annual banquet of the North Carolina Society, New York, found a warm response in the hearts of the Northern people, who have not failed to sympathize deeply with their Southern fellow citizens during their long years of affliction.

The orator expresses our feelings with rare felicity, and so keenly did his sentiments touch our hearts, it was resolved to publish his address and send it to our fellow citizens of the South as the messenger of peace and perfect reunion from their Northern countrymen.

Our Southern friends will note that no phase of the present unfortunate situation is neglected by Mr. Taft; all are dealt with in a clear and masterly manner. The North, as well as the South is enlightened as to their respective duties toward bringing about the desirable return of the South to its normal condition politically, so that American citizens in all sections of our common country will again belong to both of the great political parties, thus proving to the world that both parties command the allegiance of good citizens in all parts of the country who are desirous only for what they believe to be best for the good of the nation as a whole.

The future President of our common country, North, South, East, and West, who appeals to us, is a man of large heart, warm sympathies, and cool brain, of sound judgment and lofty purpose, who has at heart as one of the greatest possible triumphs of his administration the restoration of normal political conditions in the South. Under his wise and sympathetic leadership the writer is sanguine of success—certain of it if the influential people of all sections give him the support he so richly deserves in this truly patriotic mission:

ANDREW CARNEGIE.

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The Solid South

ADDRESS BY MR. WALTER H. PAGE

IN INTRODUCING THE HONORABLE WILLIAM H. TAFT

At the Dinner of the North Carolina Society of
New York, at the Hotel Astor. December 7, 1908

Here, if nowhere else, we leave political parties and preferences alone. But here, as everywhere else, we are patriotic men; and we North Carolinians have as our background a community that from the first showed a singularly independent temper. A freedom of opinion is our heritage. We once drove a Colonial Governor who disputed our freedom of political action to the safer shelter of the Colony of New York; and throughout our history we have shown a sort of passion for independent action, in spite of occasional eclipses; and that same temper shows itself now. We are, in fact, never sure that we are right till half our neighbors have proved that we are wrong.

We are, therefore, and have long been, much distressed by the political solidity of the states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania; and we wish that it were broken — not for the sake of the Democratic party nor for the sake of the Republican party (for the breach would benefit each alike) but for the sake of greater freedom of political action by our unfortunate fellow citizens who dwell there. Where one party has too long and secure power it becomes intolerant and the other party falls into contempt. Thus these states have become stagnant or corrupt. For the sake of free political action we wish that their political solidity might be broken, so that the whole conscience and character of their people might find full political expression. What constructive influence have they, or have they in recent years had, in the nation's thought and political progress?

For the same reasons we have taken an especial pleasure in the recent breaking up of Ohio, Minnesota, and Indiana — where on the same day presidential electors of one party and governors of the other party were chosen; for this breaking

asunder of party dominance makes both parties tolerant and careful, helping them both and showing the utmost freedom of political action. And these states contribute much to our political life.

By the same token we rush in where Texas and Virginia fear to tread, and we shall welcome the impending and inevitable breaking of the Solid South (perhaps we shall lead it), not for the sake of the Democratic party nor for the sake of the Republican party (although it would help each party equally), but for the sake of open-mindedness and of freedom of political action, so that all men there may walk by thought and not by formulas, and act by convictions and not by traditions. Wherever one party by long power breeds intolerance, the other falls into contempt. And what constructive influence have the Southern States in our larger political life? From some of them, where parties have fallen low, we have seen men go to one national convention as a mere unthinking personal following of a candidate even then clad in garments of twofold defeat; and to the conventions of the other party we have sometimes seen office-holding shepherds with their crooks drive their mottled flocks to market. We are tired of this political inefficiency, this long isolation, and these continued scandals; and we are tired of the conditions that produce them. If parties are to be instruments of civilized government, the conditions that produce such scandals must cease. We must have in the South a Democratic party of tolerance and a Republican party of character; and neither party must be ranged on lines of race.

We aspire to a higher part in the Republic than can be played by men of closed minds or of unthinking habits or by organized ignorance. We aspire again to a share in the constructive work of the government in these stirring days of great tasks at home and growing influence abroad.

I am leaving party politics severely alone, but I am speaking to a national and patriotic theme. A Republican Administration or a Democratic Administration is a passing incident in our national history. Parties themselves shift and wane. And any party's supremacy is of little moment in comparison with the isolation of a large part of the Union from its proper political influence.

The manhood and the energy and the ambition of Southern men now find effective political expression through neither party. The South, therefore, neither contributes to the Nation's political thought and influence nor receives stimulation from

the Nation's thought and influence. Its real patriotism counts for nothing — is smothered dumb under party systems that have become crimes against the character and the intelligence of the people. The South gives nothing and receives nothing from the increasing national political achievement of every decade. Politically it is yet a province; and we are tired of this barren seclusion. Men who prefer complaint to achievement may regard this as treason: let them make the most of it. We prefer a higher station in the Union than New Hampshire and Vermont and Pennsylvania and Arkansas hold.

From the first our commonwealth conspicuously stood for something greater than any party, something that antedates all our parties, that spirit of independence in political judgment and action which brought the old thirteen states into being and made the Republic possible. And that spirit is not dead yet.

If it cannot regain its old-time influence through one party, it will regain it through another.

We are the descendants of men who fashioned parties in their beginning; and, if need be, we can refashion them. For the aim of government is not to preserve parties but to give range to free individual action in a democracy. And it is in this spirit of national aspiration that we welcome our distinguished guest of honor — a man now placed above parties, and too just to regard the Republic by sections, our best equipped citizen for the highest office in the world.

TO THE PRESIDENT-ELECT: May his administration mark the return of Southern character and sincerity to its old-time part in the constructive work of government and the end forever of political isolation from the achievements and the glory of the Union!

The South and the National Government

ADDRESS BY
THE HONORABLE WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT
PRESIDENT-ELECT OF THE UNITED STATES

North Carolina presents an admirable type of the present conditions in the South. It offers, therefore, a suitable subject for the discussion planned for this evening, and I count it a privilege to be present to hear it. One, in any degree responsible for the government and welfare of the whole country at this time in her history, must take an especial interest in the trend of public opinion and the conditions, material and political, of the South.

The laws of the United States have equal operation from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. Congress has representatives from every part of the country, including the South, whose votes are recorded upon national legislation. Railroads do not break bulk between North and South. Interstate commerce goes on unvexed between the one and the other. The Post-office department distributes its mail with impartiality on each side of Mason's and Dixon's Line. Prosperity in the North is accompanied by prosperity in the South, and a halt in the one means a halt in the other. Northern people meet Southern people, and find them friendly and charming and full of graceful and grateful companionship.

What is it that sets the South apart and takes from the Southern people the responsibilities which the members of a republic ought to share in respect to the conduct of the National Government? Why is it that what is done at Washington seems to be the work of the North and the West, and not of the South? Should this state of affairs continue? These are the questions that force themselves on those of us concerned with the Government and who are most anxious to have a

solid, united country, of whose will the course of the Government shall be an intelligent interpretation and expression.

We can answer these questions as the historian would, and we can explain the situation as it is; but I don't think we can justify or excuse a continuance of it. Looking back into the past, of course, the explanation of the difference between the South and the other two sections was in the institution of slavery. It is of no purpose to point out that early in the history of the country the North was as responsible for bringing slaves here as the South. We are not concerned with whose fault it was that there was such an institution as slavery. Nor are we concerned with the probability that, had the Northerners been interested in slaves, they would have viewed the institution exactly as the Southerners viewed it and would have fought to defend it because as sacred as the institution of private property itself. It is sufficient to say, as I think we all now realize, that the institution of slavery was a bad thing and that it is a good thing to have got rid of it. It does n't help in the slightest degree in the present day to stir up the embers of the controversy of the past by attempting to fix blame on one part of the country or the other, in respect to an institution which has gone, and happily gone, on the one hand, or in respect to the consequences of that institution which we still have with us, on the other. These consequences we are to recognize as a condition and a fact, and a problem for solution rather than as an occasion for crimination or recrimination.

Over the question of the extension of slavery the Civil War came, and that contest developed a heroism on both sides, in the people from the North and the people from the South, that evokes the admiration of all Americans for American courage, self-sacrifice, and patriotism. But when slavery was abolished by the war the excision of the cancer left a wound that must necessarily be a long time in healing. Nearly 5,000,000 slaves were freed; but 5 per cent. of them could read or write; a much smaller percentage were skilled laborers. They were but as children in meeting the stern responsibilities of life as free men. As such they had to be absorbed into and adjusted to our civilization. It was a radical change, full of discouragement and obstacles. Their rights were declared by the war Amendments, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth. The one established their freedom; the second their citizenship and their rights to pursue happiness and hold

property; and the third their right not to be discriminated against in their political privileges on account of their color or previous condition of servitude.

I am not going to rehearse the painful history of reconstruction, or what followed it. I come at once to the present condition of things, stated from a constitutional and political standpoint. And that is this: That in all the Southern States it is possible, by election laws prescribing proper qualifications for the suffrage, which square with the Fifteenth Amendment and which shall be equally administered as between the black and white races, to prevent entirely the possibility of a domination of Southern state, county, or municipal governments by an ignorant electorate, white or black. It is further true that the sooner such laws, when adopted, are applied with exact equality and justice to the two races, the better for the moral tone of state and community concerned. Negroes should be given an opportunity equally with whites, by education and thrift, to meet the requirements of eligibility which the State Legislatures in their wisdom shall lay down in order to secure the safe exercise of the electoral franchise. The Negro should ask nothing other than an equal chance to qualify himself for the franchise, and when that is granted by law, and not denied by executive discrimination, he has nothing to complain of.

The proposal to repeal the Fifteenth Amendment is utterly impracticable and should be relegated to the limbo of forgotten issues. It is very certain that any party founded on the proposition would utterly fail in a national canvass. What we are considering is something practical, something that means attainable progress. It seems to me to follow, therefore, that there is, or ought to be, a common ground upon which we can all stand in respect to the race question in the South, and its political bearing, that takes away any justification for maintaining the continued solidity of the South to prevent the so-called Negro domination. The fear that in some way or other a social equality between the races shall be enforced by law or brought about by political measures really has no foundation except in the imagination of those who fear such a result. The Federal Government has nothing to do with social equality. The war amendments do not declare in favor of social equality. All that the law or Constitution attempt to secure is equality of opportunity before the law and in the pursuit of happiness, and in the enjoyment of life, liberty,

and property. Social equality is something that grows out of voluntary concessions by the individuals forming society.

With the elimination of the race question, can we say that there are removed all the reasons why the people of the South are reluctant to give up their political solidarity and divide themselves on party lines in accordance with their economic and political views? No. There are other reasons, perhaps only reasons of sentiment, but with the Southern people, who are a high-strung, sensitive, and outspoken people, considerations of sentiment are frequently quite as strong as those of some political or economic character. In the first place it is now nearly forty years since the South acquired its political solidarity, and the intensity of feeling by which it was maintained, and the ostracism and social proscription imposed on those white Southerners who did not sympathize with the necessity for such solidarity, could not but make lasting impression and create a permanent bias that would naturally outlast the reason for its original existence. The trials of the reconstruction period, the heat of the political controversies with the Republican party, all naturally, during the forty years, implanted so deep a feeling in the Southern Democratic breast that a mere change of the conditions under which this feeling was engendered could not at once remove it. The Southern people are a homogeneous people; they preserve their traditions; they are of the purest American stock; and the faith of the father is handed down to the son, even after the cause of it has ceased, almost as a sacred legacy.

Again, for a long time succeeding the war, the South continued poor. Its development was much slower than that of the rest of the country. Prosperity seemed to be Northern prosperity, not Southern. And, in such a time, the trials of life of the present only accentuated the greater trials of the past, and reminiscences of the dreadful sufferings and privations of the war were present on every hand, and feelings that the controversy had given rise to, remained with an intensity that hardly seemed to be dimmed by passing time.

But times change, and men change with them in any community, however fixed its thoughts or habits, and many circumstances have blessed us with their influence in this matter.

The growth of the South since 1890 has been marvelous. The manufacturing capital in 1880 was \$250,000,000, in 1890, \$650,000,000, in 1900, \$1,150,000,000 and in 1908, \$2,100,000,000, while the value of the manufactures

increased from \$450,000,000, in 1880 to \$900,000,000 in 1890, to \$1,450,000,000 in 1900, and to \$2,600,000,000, in 1908. The farm products in 1880 were \$660,000,000, in 1890 were \$770,000,000, in 1900, \$1,270,000,000, in 1908 \$2,220,000,000. The exports from the South in 1880 were \$260,000,000, in 1890 \$306,000,000, in 1900, \$484,000,000, and in 1908, \$648,000,000.

In this marvelous growth the manufactures of the South now exceed the agricultural products, and thus a complete change has come over the character of her industries. The South has become rich, and only the surface of her wealth has been scratched. Her growth has exceeded that of the rest of the country, and she is now in every way sharing in its prosperity.

Again, the Democratic party has not preserved inviolate its traditional doctrines as to state's rights and other issues, and has for the time adopted new doctrines of possibly doubtful economic truth and wisdom. Southern men, adhering to the party and the name, find themselves, through the influence of tradition and the fear of a restoration of conditions which are now impossible, supporting a platform and candidate whose political and economic theories they distrust. Under these conditions there was in the last campaign, and there is to-day throughout the South, among many of its most intelligent citizens, an impatience, a nervousness, and a restlessness in voting for one ticket and rejoicing in the success of another.

Now, I am not one of those who are disposed to criticize or emphasize the inconsistency of the position in which these gentlemen find themselves. I believe it would be wiser if all who sympathize with one party and its principles were to vote its ticket, but I can readily understand the weight and inertia of the tradition and the social considerations that make them hesitate. I believe that the movement away from political solidarity has started, and ought to be encouraged, and I think one way to encourage it is to have the South understand that the attitude of the North and the Republican party toward it is not one of hostility or criticism or opposition, political or otherwise; that they believe in the maintenance of the Fifteenth Amendment; but that, as already explained, they do not deem that amendment to be inconsistent with the South's obtaining and maintaining what it regards as its political safety from domination of an ignorant electorate; that the North yearns for closer association with the South; that its citizens deprecate that reserve on the subject of politics which so long

